



First Steps Provider Code of Ethical Conduct

Effective Date: July 1, 2008

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the First Steps Provider Code of Ethical Conduct is to establish a set of guidelines for appropriate, professional behavior. This Code should serve to assist First Steps Providers in evaluating their current practice, assessing and resolving potential ethical dilemmas, and ensuring a commitment to family-centered, inclusive and culturally competent care.

The Kentucky First Steps program has elected to adopt many of the principles originally developed by The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Although the full NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct was not adopted, the First Steps program supports the full Code and strongly encourages First Steps providers to review the Code in its entirety on the NAEYC website (www.naeyc.org).

Effective July 1, 2008, First Steps Program Evaluators will refer to the First Steps Provider Code of Ethical Conduct when investigating complaints regarding unethical or inappropriate behavior. The Cabinet for Health and Family Services may terminate any provider agreement immediately should egregious and/or persistent Code violations be found. For this reason, it is important that all First Steps providers review this Code and ensure that their current practice is reflective of the ethical standards outlined herein.

Principles of Ethical Responsibilities to Children

- 1.1 Above all, First Steps Providers shall not harm children. First Steps Providers shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. This principle has precedence over all others in this Code.
- 1.2 First Steps Providers shall be familiar with the risk factors for and symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse and physical, emotional, educational, and medical neglect.
- 1.3 First Steps Providers shall know and follow state laws and community procedures that protect children against abuse and neglect and shall report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate entity.

Principles of Ethical Responsibilities to Families

- 2.1 First Steps Providers shall recognize the primary importance of families and caregivers in children's development.
- 2.2 First Steps Providers shall acknowledge their responsibility to establish and maintain an effective method of communication and collaboration with parents and primary caregivers.
- 2.3 First Steps Providers shall consider information shared by families about themselves and their children to plan and implement appropriate services and supports.
- 2.4 First Steps Providers shall recognize the value of collaboration, discussion and sharing to the IFSP planning process and shall make effort to participate in person in initial and ongoing IFSP meetings.
- 2.5 First Steps Providers shall ensure that a parent and or primary caregiver is present and collaboratively involved in every service session.
- 2.6 First Steps Providers shall notify families, when possible, a reasonable amount of time prior to canceling a service session. If advance notice is not possible, First Steps Providers shall contact the family as soon as possible to explain the absence and confirm the next service session date/time.
- 2.7 First Steps Providers shall arrange their schedule in such a manner as to prevent being late for service sessions. If tardiness is unavoidable, First Steps Providers shall attempt to contact the family to notify them of the estimated arrival time, to verify that the family is still available for the service session, or to reschedule the appointment if the family cannot wait.
- 2.8 First Steps Providers shall involve families in decisions affecting their children.
- 2.9 First Steps Providers shall not engage in or support exploitation of families. Providers shall not solicit business for their agency, other providers, spouse or immediate family. Providers shall not sell or market products while representing First Steps. Providers may not lobby to families within the system, while representing First Steps. Providers shall not use their relationship with a family for private advantage or personal gain, or enter into relationships with family members that might impair their effectiveness working with the family member's child(ren).
- 2.10 First Steps Providers shall develop written policies for the protection of confidentiality and the disclosure of protected health information (PHI), including, but not limited to, a Notice of Privacy Practices. All such written policies must comply with the requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Any disclosure of PHI must be appropriately documented according to the provisions of the HIPAA.
- 2.11 First Steps Providers may not bring children/minors or other individuals not directly involved in the provision of care of the child, to early intervention services or the residence of the child or family. Doing so would be considered a breach of confidentiality and would interfere with the provider's ability to perform their job. Parents may not be requested to waive this. (Note: this does not apply to therapy students or practicing therapists who are gaining practical experience and are being supervised by the First Steps Provider.)
- 2.12 First Steps Providers shall contact the Primary Service Coordinator (PSC) to coordinate referrals to non-EI services and community resources/supports when a child or family need is identified.

Principles of Ethical Responsibilities to the First Steps Program

- 3.1 First Steps Providers shall meet and maintain all applicable licensing, credentialing, and ethical codes as established by individual licensing agencies.
- 3.2 First Steps Providers shall follow all program laws, regulations, rules, guidelines, policies, procedures and administrative directives. When First Steps Providers disagree with any of these, they shall attempt to effect change through constructive action within the First Steps Program.
- 3.3 First Steps Providers shall submit claims for reimbursement for services provided and appropriately documented. First Steps Providers shall not bill for no shows, missed appointments or other services not actually provided.
- 3.4 First Steps providers shall recognize the contributions of colleagues to our program and not participate in practices that diminish their reputations or impair their effectiveness in working with children and families.
- 3.5 First Steps Providers shall provide services in natural environments and shall provide services in a setting other than a natural environment that is most appropriate, as determined by the parent and the individualized family service plan team, only when early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in a natural environment.
- 3.6 First Steps Providers shall ensure that Individualized Family Service Plans identify appropriate services based on scientifically based, peer-reviewed research, to the extent practicable.